



Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy

1. Build support within your school and community.

A. Within the School-Educate yourself and your staff, *including teachers, aides, secretaries, food service, staff, janitors, etc.* It is beneficial to visit firsthand, or at least make contact, with another school administrator that has successfully implemented Recess Before Lunch at his/her school. Educate staff on this policy through a school staff meeting. Make a commitment to stick with it and ride out the first couple of months. School food service staff should be involved from the beginning, as they are key players in accommodating the change. Be ready for some resistance to change and small problems that arise. Keep the benefits in mind-enhanced nutrition, which supports improved behavior and learning.

B. Educate the Parents-Place a RBL article in the parent newsletter or send a letter to parents. Sprinkle RBL information/benefits/tips into the monthly school lunch menu that is provided to parents.

C. Within the Community-Share the benefits/concept of RBL at a Parent Advisory Council Meeting, school board meeting, or run an article in the local and school newspaper.

D. Educate the Students-Educate the students so that they understand the policy and schedule change.

2. Plan the new recess and lunch schedule. Meet with *all of the staff* involved, especially those directly affected by the schedule change (teachers, janitors, aides, food service) to work out the kinks. Realize that the schedule is a work in progress which may need to be revised several times. Many schools conduct a trial run for several weeks to identify scheduling issues, and then modify it as needed.

3. Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule. Hand washing is an important food safety issue that should not be overlooked. Most school schedules are written so that the children come in from recess, put coats away, wash hands, and then enter the lunchroom as a group. Other schools send children directly to the lunchroom from the playground, and provide them a disposable handy wipe or provide access to an instant sanitizer dispenser to cleanse their hands before eating.

4. Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch. It is recommended that children have at least 20 minutes from the time they sit down with their tray. Most Montana schools allow 25-30 minutes for the lunch period. Keep in mind that the younger students require more time to get through the serving line and to eat. Students must also adapt to being in the cafeteria for 20+ minutes. Many schools find it helpful to use the score clock, if available, to count down the minutes until the students are released back to their classrooms. This helps students gauge how much time they have left. Practice this change with the kids. Initially, the noise in the lunchroom may increase as the students learn to make this behavior change. Over time, schools have noticed an improved atmosphere in the cafeteria as children relearn to eat slowly, relax, and socialize more during lunch.

5. Increase the presence of school staff in the lunchroom initially. Principals and other school staff should spend as much time as possible in the lunchroom, especially during the first couple of weeks, to practice this new routine with the students. This helps ease the transition into and out of the lunchroom and allows extra supervision as the students learn a new routine. This exemplifies staff support of the RBL policy and the school lunch program, while enhancing the atmosphere of the lunch period.



Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools with Recess Before Lunch Policies

- ★ **Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome.** It is do-able; it just takes some creative planning and flexibility. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. No extra staff has been required as a result of the change. See examples of schedules from MT schools included in this guide for ideas.
- ★ Montana administrators, who have been successful in implementing RBL policies, recommend **looking past the logistics of the scheduling change and concentrating on what is best for the kids.**
- ★ **It's important to get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start.** Really promote the improvement in children's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
- ★ **Younger kids (K-2) tend to "accept" the change in scheduling better than the older kids initially.** Focus groups with Montana students have shown that the younger kids "perceive" the change in a more positive way.
- ★ **Feedback from food service staff from all of the schools has been positive** with no problems reported from their end.
- ★ **Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards for easy access.**
- ★ **Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess.** Others keep the accounting procedure the same. This has not been identified as a potential problem area.
- ★ **Kids are likely to be hungrier and thirstier with this change.** Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school's breakfast program. Schools are having dispensers of ice water available in the cafeteria to quench thirst. Middle schools may also opt to sell bottled water as part of an ala carte program.

